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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 001073

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: RIOT AT HCMC DRUG REHABILITATION CENTER

1. (SBU) Summary: An October 2 riot in a HCMC juvenile rehabilitation center for drug users and sex workers resulted in the escape of approximately 800 detainees. Most of the detainees have returned to the center, some voluntarily, some involuntarily. Authorities reported to us that fewer than ten detainees were injured as the result of the riot. The incident appears to have resulted from a fight between rival gangs, but may also have been part an escape plan. End Summary.

2. (U) On October 2 at 1930h, a riot broke out involving approximately 800 of 1,500 detainees at Youth Rehabilitation Center No. 2 (one of the 05/06 centers for treatment of drug-users and sex workers) in Hamlet 3, Pham van Coi Commune, in Cu Chi District. The detainee drug user population at this facility consists of students, jobless, and petty criminals who have other records with the police.

3. (U) According to Thanh Nien ("Youth") newspaper, approximately 800 detainees were involved in the two-hour riot, which caused significant property damage, injured an undetermined number of other detainees, and culminated in the rioters' escape from Center No. 2. The riot resulted from a fight that allegedly started between two rival groups within the facility. As the number of detainees involved in the fight rose, the situation became too violent to be controlled by the center's guards. The detainees then broke windows, doors and gates to escape. When more than 100 riot police from Cu Chi District and other areas of HCMC arrived at 2130h (two hours after the riot started), 798 detainees had left and only 684 remained at Center No. 2. By noon the next day, approximately 500 detainees were recaptured, but almost 300 remained at large. Major Tra Van Lao, Deputy Director of Cu Chi District Police, who was present at the scene, commented in the press that it was impossible to say the escape was not premeditated, given its size and the severity of the incident.

4. (SBU) Mr. Nguyen Van Dung, director of the center, and Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Thach, director of HCMC's Social Evil Prevention and Control Bureau, would only tell PolOff that the police are investigating the case. However, Ms. Nguyen Thi Thanh Mai (strictly protect), a ConGen contact at the HCMC Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DoLISA), confirmed the news story was correct. Mai stated that as the detainees at Center No. 2 also came from areas outside of HCMC, it is taking the police and local authorities more time to find them. The HCMC police are contacting authorities in the hometowns of the missing detainees to enlist their help in the search. Mai said that fewer than ten people were injured in this incident.

5. (SBU) Dr. Le Truong Giang, Chairman of HCMC AIDS Committee, told PolOff October 12 the incident was organized by drug-user "group leaders." USAID contacts confirmed that the center is for detainees aged 18 and younger, but some of the leaders were as old as 25 and had been detained for long periods. The HCMC AIDS Committee said that all detainees were being returned to Center No. 2, but that the government is implementing a new screening process to separate gang leaders into in higher security facilities. Giang added that the government offered a "forgiveness program" to the escapees, guaranteeing there would be no additional punishment or time added prison terms if they cooperate and return immediately. Those who do not cooperate will have their sentences extended upon their capture. According to Giang, in the past 3-4 days over 500 escapees or their families called the center to arrange for returns.

6. (SBU) COMMENT: Mai of DOLISA told us this incident was unique to Center No. 2, and has not occurred at other facilities. However, this was the second riot at Center No. 2. On September 25, 170 detainees were involved in another incident, and eleven were injured. According to Mission contacts, the October 2 riot and escape was planned based on the "lessons learned" during the first event. Furthermore, USAID contacts in Hanoi reported that in May 2005 approximately 300 residents escaped from the Giang Minh drug rehabilitation facility run by the Youth Union in Hai Phong.

7. (SBU) COMMENT, CONTINUED: Dr. Giang noted that there is a very low ratio of staff (including janitors and kitchen workers) to detainees (approximately one to ten) at all the rehabilitation centers, so it is virtually impossible to

prevent a breakout.

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